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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [MNUC](#) [KNNP](#) [UNSC](#) [KN](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: MOSCOW EXPERTS ON DPRK NUCLEAR TEST

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns: Reasons: 1.4 (b, d).

11. (C) Summary. Despite the GOR's strongly negative reaction to the reported nuclear test and its cooperation on UNSC 1718, Moscow's Korea watchers were for the large part critical of U.S. policies, arguing that the impasse over the DPRK program could have been avoided had the U.S. acted differently. The test surprisingly does not seem to have changed public opinion or experts' views on North Korea. Many continue to view North Korea as a poor and isolated regime that seeks increased international attention through direct negotiations with the U.S. Most thought the U.S. and China were better placed to resolve the nuclear issue, while Russia has very little to offer. End summary.

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Public Biases, Institutional Interests

12. (C) While the nuclear test was front-page news here as elsewhere, public attention quickly returned to Russia's ongoing dispute with Georgia. The Director of the Institute of Contemporary International Studies Yevgeniy Bazhanov maintained that Russians do not think about North Korea in a sustained way, and public opinion had little effect on Korea policy. An opinion poll published after the test revealed that forty-six percent of the respondents thought the U.S. had created the North Korean problem and were happy to let the U.S. worry about it. Few saw even a nuclear-armed North as a threat to Russia. A series of conversations over the last several days with Moscow's Korea specialists suggests that expert reaction falls into three broad categories:

-- those who hold the U.S. alone responsible for the current impasse,

-- selective critics of the USG approach, who emphasize the need for continued negotiations,

-- a few experts who generally support USG efforts to contain North Korea by imposing stronger sanctions.

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The Blame America Crowd

13. (C) Finding scholars who are quick to blame U.S. actions for "forcing" North Korea to test is not difficult among Asia experts at the older think tanks, who are often reflexively anti-American. However, these scholars often reflect the views of at least some in the Kremlin and MFA who shape policy. Mikhail Titarenko, Director of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies, who is a sinologist by training, sees the Russia-China alliance as a necessary counterbalance to U.S. influence in the region. He argued that the U.S. must simply make peace with the fact that "North Korea exists and is not going anywhere." Titarenko also criticized U.S. fulfillment

of the Agreed Framework. He argued, along with Aleksandr Zhebin of the Far Eastern Studies Institute and Aleksandr Vorontsov of the Institute of Oriental Studies, that the U.S. had not engaged in good faith negotiations during the Six-Party Talks, and had been deceptive about its intentions.

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Time to Ask Tough Questions

14. (C) Gennadiy Chufrin, Deputy Director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), acknowledged that the situation on the Peninsula was serious and that the international community must act to change it. Chufrin argued that if the international community cannot halt North Korea's drive to acquire a nuclear arsenal, the already tattered NPT regime will collapse. However, like those analysts who question U.S. motives, Chufrin suggested that as a first step, the U.S. needed to define what it wants: regime change, North Korea back in the NPT, or resumed Six Party Talks. Chufrin thought the strongly held perception that U.S. policy favored regime change created fatal disharmony among its partners in the Six Party Talks.

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What is To Be Done?

15. (C) When pressed on how the international community should respond to the tests, many of the experts we spoke to at the two regional institutes were convinced that sanctions did not work, and argued that Russia's support for sanctions through UNSCR 1718 was little more than a gesture of solidarity with the international community. Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) scholar Aleksandr Bogaturov predicted that further sanctions would

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have no effect on the DPRK. He described the clause on luxury items as "humorous." Interlocutors here seemed to place more faith in what they characterized as gradual but steady efforts by South Korea to encourage the North to adopt a more market-based economy ("developing a taste for money," as one specialist put it). That process would be painfully slow, but held out better prospects for success than what they characterized as continued U.S. "provocations." Yevgeniy Bazhanov, who is often viewed as pro-Western, saw "hypocrisy" and a "double standard" in the USG's willingness to condemn North Korea's human rights record while overlooking failures by U.S. partners like Saudi Arabia. Washington's willingness to countenance the nuclearization of Pakistan, India, and Israel while imposing sanctions on North Korea made many here question U.S. sincerity, said Bazhanov.

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Russia Lacks Leverage

16. (C) While there was little consensus on what measures might be effective, the experts we spoke to at the Institute of Oriental Studies and the Institute of Far Eastern Studies believed that on a political and diplomatic level, Russia had little real potential on its own to turn the situation around. On the other hand, they noted that China had failed to influence the DPRK's behavior despite its own perceived leverage. Most thought that left the U.S. as the most important player. Experts here believed it unlikely at this stage that the North would agree to take any steps backward, but it might, under certain circumstances, be persuaded to freeze further development. Winning that concession, however, would require unmediated U.S. overtures to the DPRK. All highlighted the difficulties of verification of a freeze, which would be possible only if all members of the Six Party Talks cooperated. The experts thought, however, that if the U.S. goal remained regime change, the DPRK would continue efforts to acquire an arsenal; something that no country in the region wanted.

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¶7. (C) A handful of Moscow experts expressed frustration at the lack of more coordinated measures against North Korea and saw DPRK nuclear weapons capability as a threat to Russian interests. IMEMO's Georgiy Kunadze suggested that the P-5 should cooperate not only on political declarations, but on developing and using every other lever -- political, economic and military -- to address the DPRK threat. IMEMO's Vasilii Mikheyev believed that, if anything, the DPRK's test had brought the Chinese and U.S. positions closer together. He noted China's reinforced border at Dandong and the cessation of cross-border money transfers. Mikheyev and MGIMO's Aleksandr Lukin went so far as to support a trilateral military exercise -- Russia, China, and the U.S.-- as a demonstration of resolve. They agreed -- although they acknowledged that Russia would not sign on -- that the DPRK test site should be destroyed in the event of another test.

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Comment: Head in the Sand?

¶8. (C) Once the initial shock had subsided, Moscow expert circles quickly resumed their standard lines on the DPRK. Most experts do not view North Korea's nuclear ambitions as a direct threat to Russian interests. Dissatisfaction with the USG's approach to the DPRK is widespread here among the academic community. Even foreign policy "moderates" in Moscow subscribed to the belief that it was U.S. behavior that is responsible for the current impasse. Most informed observers believed that Russia should and would implement the UNSCR, but saw little utility in the measures it prescribes. In their view, the U.S. holds all of the cards, but it is a weak hand in their view, and the possibilities of success are slim. Few expected Moscow to do much more than lend rhetorical support to efforts to restrain Pyongyang.
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